Five Arks

Jeff Schiff
The Plan

Five days
I've practiced the sabbath
kneeling at the foot of a Joshua –
made five fires, held
each one as a finger
against the rain-tried
to build a boat, but my family
stayed behind.

The Question

I ask my grandfather
where is the moon?
He is at my side
and leans
close enough to answer. His mouth
is the moon. He will not speak, though,
but bends
as his skullcap falls:
swim, we shall get there sooner.

The New Ark

Grandmother
kneeling for us
in her backyard
begins the new ark:
lemon peel, boxer,
crook of the forked olive.
Rib-bone, thighbone,
skin of a thousand moons
laced with daughter's hair.
The rough of a tree. A birdbath.

Her breasts lull me into the afterlife.

The Portent

Mother
standing at the screened door
reminds my father:
    gold for the pantspocket, goldstone.
    Bread for the breastpocket, never go hungry.
    For the sandals, bung shards. Try to keep afloat.

For some reason
he would not dress that morning
but wandered downtown naked
through the streets, whistling
as he passed the schoolyards,
his clothes strewn in a star
upon the front lawn.

The Journey

Five days
I've watched trout
well in the belly
of a pond, numinous eyes
trailing into white.
Have fingered my pockets
wanting almost to mount their frail bones.
Placed mud on my scalp
only to hear them murmur
and rock.

Still, I have decided
to wait with the rain, listening
for their tiny hulls
and to follow behind them
into morning light.